

Brexit: Breakthrough in Brussels after week of drama

London (CNN) The UK and the European Union reached a significant milestone in their pursuit of a Brexit deal on Friday, breaking a deadlock that allows talks to move on to a crucial second phase.

After a night of last minute shuttle diplomacy that capped months of tortuous negotiations, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and British Prime Minister Theresa May announced the breakthrough at an early morning press conference in Brussels.

Crucially, the two sides reached a deal on the historically sensitive issue of the Irish border, which had threatened to derail the talks as they reached a critical moment earlier this week. Discussions can now move on to the potentially more thorny issue of a future trading relationship between the UK and the EU.

The breakthrough represents a significant coup for May, whose beleaguered leadership had appeared under threat as talks faltered. It was also a relief for EU negotiators, who feared a complete breakdown in talks if a deal was not done.

A deal was done on three key issues: Britain's Brexit "divorce" bill, the rights of EU citizens in the UK after Brexit, and the Irish border.

"Getting to this point required give and take on both sides," May said. "And I believe the joint report that is being published is in the best interest of the whole of the UK."

Border arrangements between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which remains in the EU, had been a sticking point, with fears check points could damage both economies and undermine hard-won peace in the North.

Following late night talks between May's Conservatives and her governing partners, the hardline Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party, May rushed to Brussels Friday.

Speaking alongside May in the European capital, Juncker said, "we had to make the deal today," as a December 14 deadline approached.

“Sufficient progress has now been made on the three terms of the divorce,” Juncker said, referring to conditions the EU had requested regarding a number of issues including the Irish border. Negotiations for the UK to leave the EU can now proceed to the next stage.

Source: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/08/europe/brexit-theresa-may-britain/index.html>

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